

### AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1 - 2. (canceled)

3. A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim ~~[[2]]~~ 11, wherein said wire gauze comprises stainless steel wire gauze.

4. (Original) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim 3, wherein said first nonwoven filter has a surface which interfaces said wire gauze and a second surface distant therefrom, and wherein said first nonwoven filter has a porosity which is greatest in the neighborhood of said second surface and is least in the neighborhood of said interface surface.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim ~~[[5]]~~ 4, wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises stainless steel fiber.

7. (Original) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim 4, wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises a porous aggregate of metal particles.

8. (Original) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim 4, wherein there is at least one second nonwoven filter comprising sintered metal arranged vertically above said first nonwoven filter, and wherein said paste is filtered by said second nonwoven filter prior to being filtered by said first nonwoven filter.

9. (Original) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim 8, wherein said wire gauze is disposed at the vertically below said first

nonwoven filter and there is a second wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh disposed vertically above said second nonwoven filter, and wherein said paste is filtered through said second wire gauze prior to being filtered by said second nonwoven filter.

10. (Canceled).

11. (Currently amended) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film ~~according to Claim 2, comprising filtering a paste through a filter comprising a first nonwoven fabric filter having a mesh opening size of about 1 to 20  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises a multitude of sintered folded linear metal fibers, wherein said paste comprises a solid material and an organic vehicle, and said paste has a viscosity in the range of about 1 to 50 Pa•s, and wherein after passing through said first nonwoven filter said paste is filtered through a wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh, whereby undesired lump material are removed from said paste.~~

12. (Original) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim 11, wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises stainless steel fiber.

13. (Currently amended) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film ~~according to Claim 2, comprising filtering a paste through a filter comprising a first nonwoven fabric filter having a mesh opening size of about 1 to 20  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises a sintered porous aggregate of metal particles, wherein said paste comprises a solid material and an organic vehicle, and said paste has a viscosity in the range of about 1 to 50 Pa•s, and wherein after passing through said first nonwoven filter said paste is filtered through a wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh, whereby undesired lump material are removed from said paste.~~

14. (Currently amended) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film ~~according to Claim 2~~, comprising filtering a paste through a filter comprising a first nonwoven fabric filter comprising sintered metal and having a mesh opening size of about 1 to 20  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said paste comprises a solid material and an organic vehicle, and wherein said paste has a viscosity in the range of about 1 to 50 Pa $\cdot$ s, and wherein after passing through said first nonwoven filter said paste is filtered through a wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh, whereby undesired lump material are removed from said paste, wherein there is at least one second nonwoven filter comprising sintered metal arranged vertically above said first nonwoven filter, and wherein said paste is filtered by said second nonwoven filter prior to being filtered by said first nonwoven filter.

15. (Original) A method for manufacturing a paste for forming a thick film according to Claim 14, wherein said wire gauze is disposed at the vertically below said first nonwoven filter and there is a second wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh disposed vertically above said second nonwoven filter, and wherein said paste is filtered through said second wire gauze prior to being filtered by said second nonwoven filter.

16 - 17. (Canceled)

18. (Currently amended) A filter apparatus according to Claim ~~[[17]]~~ 20, wherein said wire gauze comprises stainless steel wire gauze.

19. (Currently amended) A filter apparatus according to Claim ~~[[17]]~~ 20, wherein said first nonwoven filter has a surface which interfaces said wire gauze and a second surface distant therefrom, and wherein said first nonwoven filter has a porosity

which is greatest in the neighborhood of said second surface and which is least in the neighborhood of said interface surface.

20. (Currently amended) A filter apparatus ~~according to Claim 17~~ comprising a filter for filtering a paste which comprises a solid material and an organic vehicle and has a viscosity in the range of about 1 to 50 Pa•s, said filter comprising a first sintered nonwoven fabric filter having a mesh opening size of about 1 to 20  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said filter comprises said first nonwoven filter which comprises sintered metal in combination with a wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh, wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises a sintered multitude of folded linear metal fibers.

21. (Original) A filter apparatus according to Claim 20 wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises stainless steel fiber.

22. (Currently amended) A filter apparatus ~~according to Claim 17~~ comprising a filter for filtering a paste which comprises a solid material and an organic vehicle and has a viscosity in the range of about 1 to 50 Pa•s, said filter comprising a first sintered nonwoven fabric filter having a mesh opening size of about 1 to 20  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said filter comprises said first nonwoven filter which comprises sintered metal in combination with a wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh, wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises a sintered porous aggregate of metal particles.

23. (Currently amended) A filter apparatus ~~according to Claim 17~~ comprising a filter for filtering a paste which comprises a solid material and an organic vehicle and has a viscosity in the range of about 1 to 50 Pa•s, said filter comprising a first sintered nonwoven fabric filter having a mesh opening size of about 1 to 20  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said filter comprises said first nonwoven filter which comprises sintered metal in

combination with a wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh,  
~~having~~ and at least one second nonwoven filter comprising sintered metal disposed  
vertically above said first nonwoven filter.

24. (Original) A filter apparatus according to Claim 23, having a second wire gauze comprising knitted metal wires in the shape of a mesh disposed vertically above said second nonwoven filter.

25. (Canceled)

26. (New) A filter apparatus according to Claim 23 wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises stainless steel fiber.

27. (New) A filter apparatus according to Claim 23, wherein said wire gauze comprises stainless steel wire gauze.

28. (New) A filter apparatus according to Claim 23, wherein said first nonwoven filter has a surface which interfaces said wire gauze and a second surface distant therefrom, and wherein said first nonwoven filter has a porosity which is greatest in the neighborhood of said second surface and which is least in the neighborhood of said interface surface.

29. (New) A filter apparatus according to Claim 22 wherein said first nonwoven filter comprises stainless steel fiber.

30. (New) A filter apparatus according to Claim 22, wherein said wire gauze comprises stainless steel wire gauze.

31. (New) A filter apparatus according to Claim 22, wherein said first nonwoven filter has a surface which interfaces said wire gauze and a second surface distant

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therefrom, and wherein said first nonwoven filter has a porosity which is greatest in the neighborhood of said second surface and which is least in the neighborhood of said interface surface.